

Last week I was in a team meeting here at church with five other men and two women. We met for about three hours, talked about a dozen different decisions, and at the end I closed in prayer. It was a passionate moment in which I was really trying to appeal to God and ask him to move among us in a powerful way. I intended to ask God to help us grow in our love and our trust for one another, but in my zeal, I accidentally combined the two words and what came out was, “*God, I really want you to help us grow in our lust for one another.*” It was not the end to the meeting I was hoping for. As we talk about things like sexuality and relationships, we want there to be an appropriate amount of lightheartedness at times, and other times there needs to be a high level of seriousness because of the gravity of the things we are talking about and the impact they have on our lives. As we said last week, our goal for this entire conversation is to ground every discussion in the truth of God’s Word and to have a posture of humility, compassion, and love.

A while ago I heard a story of a pastor named John Laroux who went to a support group of men who were struggling with unwanted sexual desires. It was a rather large group, only men. As the meeting got started one man stood up and shared about a struggle from a few days before. He said he was driving home from work one evening. It was late. He passed a strip club and when he did, he felt this surge of energy inside of him and an intense temptation to go inside. When he said that, many hands in the room went up. John said he looked around confused, wondering why everyone was doing this—were they trying to ask a question? The man went on to say he pulled into the parking lot; he knew he shouldn’t get out of his car and walk in, but he did. Again, lots of hands going up. John was still confused. He talked about going in and the poor decision he made when he was in there. Hands go up. Then he talked about walking out a few hours later, sitting in his car with an overwhelming feeling of guilt and shame; he was so sure God couldn’t love him anymore, that he could never be forgiven for what he did. When he said that, every single hand in the room went up, except for John’s; he still didn’t know what was going on. Afterward, he went to the director and asked him what was going on—why was everyone raising their hands. The director said, “We have a rule in our group: no one is allowed to believe the lie that they struggle alone. If someone shares a temptation they faced or a sin they succumbed to, and you’ve been there, too, you raise your hand. No one struggles alone; we are all in this together.” I love that story. That sort of humility and encouragement shouldn’t be found only in a support group; it should be found in the church. The church is not a place for pointed fingers, where we expose or condemn others for their sins. The church is a place for raised hands, where we all say together, “I’ve been there. I’ve struggled. No matter where you may be, you are not alone.”

Last Sunday we began a nine week series in which we are talking about sex and relationships. I’m glad most of you came back! Last week we talked about God’s vision for sexuality—basically an overview of what the Scriptures teach and how God’s vision for sexuality is uniquely challenging, uniquely dignifying, and uniquely satisfying. Today we are going to talk about sexual brokenness. As we do, again, there is no finger pointing. There is no shame and condemnation directed toward anyone because the reality is, in one way or another, we are all in the same boat together.

I just have a few points I want to cover today as we talk about sexual brokenness. Here’s the first: the encompassing reach of sexual brokenness. This is something highlighted all throughout Scripture. Sometimes our default assumption is to believe the Bible is this prim and proper book about perfect people who have perfect marriages and perfect kids, that the Bible is a collection of stories of people who are way better than us, people who we could only ever aspire to be like, but probably never will. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is the story of God meeting humanity where we actually are—not where we would like to be, not where we pretend to be, but where we actually are. We shouldn’t be

surprised to find how many accounts of sexual brokenness are recorded in the Scriptures. Abraham, the father of faith, encouraged his wife to join Pharaoh's harem in order to keep himself safe. Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, married two sisters, and then, because of the rivalry in their weird love triangle, ended up sleeping with both of their female servants. Can you imagine what it was like as a kid coming down the stairs to get cereal in the morning in that house? “Good morning, Dad.” “Hi, Mom.” “Hi, other Mom.” “Hi, other Mom.” “Hi, other Mom.” Significant levels of dysfunction. Judah, one of Jacob’s kids (who happens to be in the lineage of Jesus) slept with a prostitute—and to make matters worse, the prostitute happened to be his daughter-in-law, who concealed her identity to trick him because she wanted her father-in-law to get her pregnant. The book of Genesis has multiple accounts of rape, incest, polygamy, and adultery—and that’s just the first book of the Bible!

Again, that’s because the Bible deals with real life. All of our lives, to some extent or another, have felt the encompassing reach of sexual brokenness. Some in this room were conceived out of wedlock and in some cases out of sexual assault. Many in this room, when you were young, one of your parents cheated on the other, so you grew up in an atmosphere shaped by sexual brokenness. Most all of us can remember the first time we were exposed to pornography. For some of us, that exposure led to an addiction, to hundreds and hundreds of hours with your eyes glued to a screen filled with graphic images as though in a trance. If the statistics hold true, then a couple hundred people in this room have experienced sexual assault. For some, it wasn’t just a one-time violation, but something that transpired over the course of many months or years. Some have an extended window of time in their teenage years or twenties where there was a lot of alcohol and partying, and a lot of partners, some of whom you barely knew. Some in this room have cheated on their spouses. Some in this room have had a spouse cheat on them. Some in this room are in a marriage in which, for one reason or another, they haven’t been intimate with their spouse in years. I could give example after example of the encompassing reach of sexual brokenness. Again, it wouldn’t be finger pointing—look at this person, look at that person. If we had that rule where we all raise our hands, every one of us would have our hands raised because of something we have done, something that has been done to us, or a combination of both.

In both the Bible and in real life, there is simply no way to deny the encompassing reach of sexual brokenness. One of the reasons that is so painful to recognize is because of the surprising depth of sexual brokenness, meaning sexual brokenness has a way of impacting and shaping us unlike anything else in our lives. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.” Our souls are housed inside our bodies. When we do things with our bodies that are unhealthy, or when things are done to our bodies that are unhealthy, it shapes our souls.

There is a story in the Bible of a woman who had been married five different times. In Israel at that time, a woman didn’t have the legal right to initiate a divorce. That means five different men had promised to love her for the rest of her life. Then five different men, after sharing a home with her and sharing a bed with her, decided that she was unworthy and sent her away. She was presently living with a man who was not her husband. She’s cohabiting, maybe for companionship, maybe for security and financial provision, we don’t know. But because of her broken past she felt unworthy, disgraced, and shameful, which led her into isolation. Sin always causes us to turn inward and draw away from other people, and sexual sin causes us to do that more than any other kind of sin. Every day, when it came time to draw water, all the other women in town would go in the cool of the morning. They would socialize, connecting and telling stories. But not this woman. Because of her sexual brokenness, she waited until all the other women had left. She waited until the hottest part of the day to go and draw water, specifically because she didn’t want to interact with anyone else. Her brokenness made her feel unworthy. Her shame told her no one would accept her and she was all alone.

She's not alone in that. Sexual brokenness impacts all of us. Whether it was an action we decided to do, or something done to us, it's remarkable how deep it can impact us. Abuse as a child, left unresolved, can shape you into your thirties, forties, fifties and beyond. Addiction to pornography can drive a massive wedge between you and your spouse and make true intimacy nearly impossible. An affair can tear apart an entire family. Some people, after an unwanted sexual encounter swear off relationships entirely, not sure they'll ever be able to trust someone again. Sadly, with both of these first two points, I have to spend very little time establishing the legitimacy of the statement, because we all know by personal testimony the encompassing reach and the surprising depth of sexual brokenness. That's where a lot of people are at right now. Feeling demoralized and dejected, and not sure what, if anything, can be done about it. That is a very challenging place to be, and that is the exact place Jesus wants to meet you.

When Jesus enters into the conversation, we go from simply recognizing the encompassing reach of sexual brokenness to realizing the encompassing reach of God's grace. As far reaching as sexual brokenness can be, God's grace reaches infinitely farther. Our tendency is to think we are alone in our brokenness. We aren't. Our tendency is to think we have to do the work to overcome our brokenness on our own. We don't. Most of us go to visit a dentist every six months. I want to take a survey here. Please,, be honest—no lying in church. How many of you brush harder and longer the morning you are going to see the dentist than you do every other day of the year? I know I do. I'm talking about Olympic level brushing. On the morning I go the dentist, I don't even have to do a workout because I already burned 600 calories, which is comical, right? We are going to a place where they will use special instruments and expertise to clean our teeth for us, but we try to make ourselves appear better than we are by cleaning ourselves up before we get there. What many of us do before visiting the dentist we have the tendency of doing with our sexual brokenness before God. But it's not what we need to do. Has anyone ever gone to the dentist, been told to open wide, and had the dentist look in and say, "You might as well go home. Your oral hygiene is so poor there is nothing I can do to help you"? Of course not. The dentist is there, no matter the issue, to meet you where you are and help you. God is the same way. You don't need to try to hide your brokenness. He is not going to turn you away because of your brokenness. He's going to meet you right where you are and give you the perfect care to help you get to the place you need to be.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul says, "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." There are nine different kinds of sins and sinners listed here. Three of them have to do with sexual brokenness. At first this message looks incredibly demoralizing. If I've messed up, I have no hope. But all we have to do is look at the following verse: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." In other words, we need to be honest and real: sexual brokenness, along with all other sins, disqualifies us from entering the kingdom of God. But what we could never qualify for based on our morality, our purity, or our goodness, God has accomplished for us. This passage says he has done three things for us:

- "You were washed," meaning the dirt and stain of our sins has been wiped clean. This is what the prophets of the Old Testament spoke of: though our sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. They are red like crimson; they shall be as wool. When I am in the water of baptism with people I tell them, as you go under the water, imagine the stain of every sin you've ever committed being washed clean by the grace of Christ.
- "You were sanctified." This is an incredible word. It means to set apart and make holy. In the Bible, the most frequent use for this word is to describe a vessel or object that was once committed to common use but is now set apart to only be used for God. A chair went from being used in a public space, then it was sanctified, moved into the temple, and now is only used for the Lord. This curtain went from being used in a house, then it was sanctified, set apart for special

use, moved into the temple, and now only used for the Lord. This is what God has done for everyone whose sins have been washed clean: he has set us apart. You used to use your body for common purposes, you did whatever you wanted with it. Now you belong to God; he is setting you apart for himself. Nothing you did in your past can disqualify you, and from this point forward, you have a new purpose.

- “You were justified,” which literally means you have been declared righteousness. It’s a courtroom word. It pictures you sitting in a defendant’s chair, with all of your sins and mistakes read aloud. These are the accusations made against you. A detailed list of all your sins, sexual sins included. Even though you did these things, when the gavel drops, the judge not only says, “not guilty” or “found innocent”—that would have been enough—but the judge says “found righteous.” How is that possible? On the cross, Jesus took all our sins and paid the price for them. When we place our faith in Jesus, God takes his perfect standing and imparts it to us.

God really does transform people. I have a good friend who is a pastor down in Texas. He wanted to show the people who were visiting the church who were not Christians the impact that God can make in our lives when we surrender to Jesus, so he asked people to write down on cards one line of what was happening in their lives before Jesus and the change Jesus made. He stood on stage and started reading them off, one by one: I was angry and now have peace, I was addicted and now have self-control. One couple wrote, “We were swinging, and now we have a wonderful marriage.” This pastor’s 10-year-old son came up to him later that day and said, “Dad, I don’t get it, why aren’t people allowed to swing once they get married?” Thank God his son didn’t understand the other meaning of that word. Thank God that he really does change lives.

No one can deny the encompassing reach of sexual brokenness, but the encompassing reach of God’s great is infinitely greater. That’s not the only thing God’s grace does. We talked about the surprising depth of sexual brokenness. As we open the Scriptures, we also learn of the surprising depth of God’s grace. As deep as the impact of sexual brokenness can reach, God’s grace reaches infinitely deeper still. Remember the woman whose story is mentioned in John 4, the woman who went to draw well in the middle of the day, in secret, so she wouldn’t have to see or interact with anyone else. Well, one day, when she went to the well, she was surprised to see someone else there. Even though it was women who did most of the water-drawing work, it was a man sitting there. Even though this was an entirely Samaritan community, this man was Jewish. His name was Jesus. She began asking him questions like, “Why are you, a Jewish man, talking to me, a Samaritan woman?” But Jesus cut right past all the superficial stuff and said, “Why don’t you go and call your husband, and come back and I’ll talk to both of you.” He didn’t skirt around the sexual brokenness; he went right to the place of greatest pain. She said, “I don’t have a husband.” She was willing to admit part of it, but Jesus pressed her even deeper. “Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.’” We can’t hide from Jesus. He knows everything we’ve ever done. He knows everything we’ve ever done that was wrong. He knows everything wrong that has ever been done to us. I think this is Jesus’ way, without any shame, of saying to her, “I know everything about your life, every area that could cause shame, every reason why you think no one else would ever want to be at this well with you. I know it fully, I know it completely, and look— I still came here to meet with you.”

Do you know what Jesus offered her in their conversation? He said, “I want to give you living water.” Not the kind of water she could draw up out of the well, but a water that she could drink and never thirst again, a water that would quench the deepest desires and longings in her soul. She had been going from one relationship to the next to the next to the next, trying to find some sort of meaning, some sort of purpose and value, someone to help her know she was worthy and loved. Jesus said looking for that in relationships is like coming to this well. It’ll last for a little while, but just like you’ve experienced your

entire life, you have to keep coming back again and again and again. Jesus alone can fill that longing. He meets us in our area of greatest brokenness, tells us he knows everything we've ever done and everything that's ever been done to us, and still promises to satisfy our souls and give us eternal life.

We are hard-wired to believe that our mistakes make us less valuable, and that the more we mess up, or the more damage we have, the less other people will love us and the less God will love us. Sadly, sometimes that is the way others treat us, but that is never the way God treats us. There is this really incredible story in the Old Testament about a righteous man named Hosea who God called toward a very unusual mission. He called him to marry a woman named Gomer, a rather unfortunate name. She had a checkered past, to put it lightly. She was a woman with a lot of sexual baggage who didn't know the first thing about how to be faithful to a man. Hosea married her. From the very beginning she started to go out on him. They had three children; some of them weren't his. Finally, she just left. She sold herself to be with another man. It's a heartbreaking story. But the entire relationship was intended to be a living example, a testimony and picture of what God's relationship is like with us, his people. God is faithful; we are often faithless. God is loving and kind toward us. Often we seek fulfillment not from him but from other people and things. With this being a living picture of God and his people, what does Hosea, as the example of God do? He's justified to file for divorce and sever the relationship. Does he do that? He's justified to close his heart toward her and never talk to her again. Does he do that? No. God speaks to Hosea and says because you are a picture of my love for my people, of how I treat my people in the midst of their brokenness, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods" (Hosea 3:1). He had to pay a lot of money to buy her back. But it didn't matter. He wanted to get his bride.

That is the picture of God toward us. He finds people who are messed up, people with a checkered past, people who have all sorts of wounds and baggage and issues. Even though there is nothing worthy in us, he decides to love us, he enters into a covenant relationship with us. Even though we continue to fail and sin and invite sexual brokenness into our lives, the cross is the perfect, the ultimate picture of the price he is willing to pay for us to come back to him. No one can deny the surprising depths of sexual brokenness, but it pales in comparison to the surprising depths of God's grace.

Many of you are familiar with Kintsugi, the Japanese artform of repairing broken pottery. When a valuable vase or bowl is broken, instead of throwing it away, an expert craftsman collects all the pieces and then uses pure gold to bond them together again. The end result is pottery that is not only able to be used again, it's more aesthetically pleasing than before. The cracks aren't painted over and hidden. They are accented with a precious metal—brokenness turned into beauty. That's what God does with the brokenness in our lives. Not just for some of it or most of all, but all of it. Every. Last. Piece.

Let's pray.